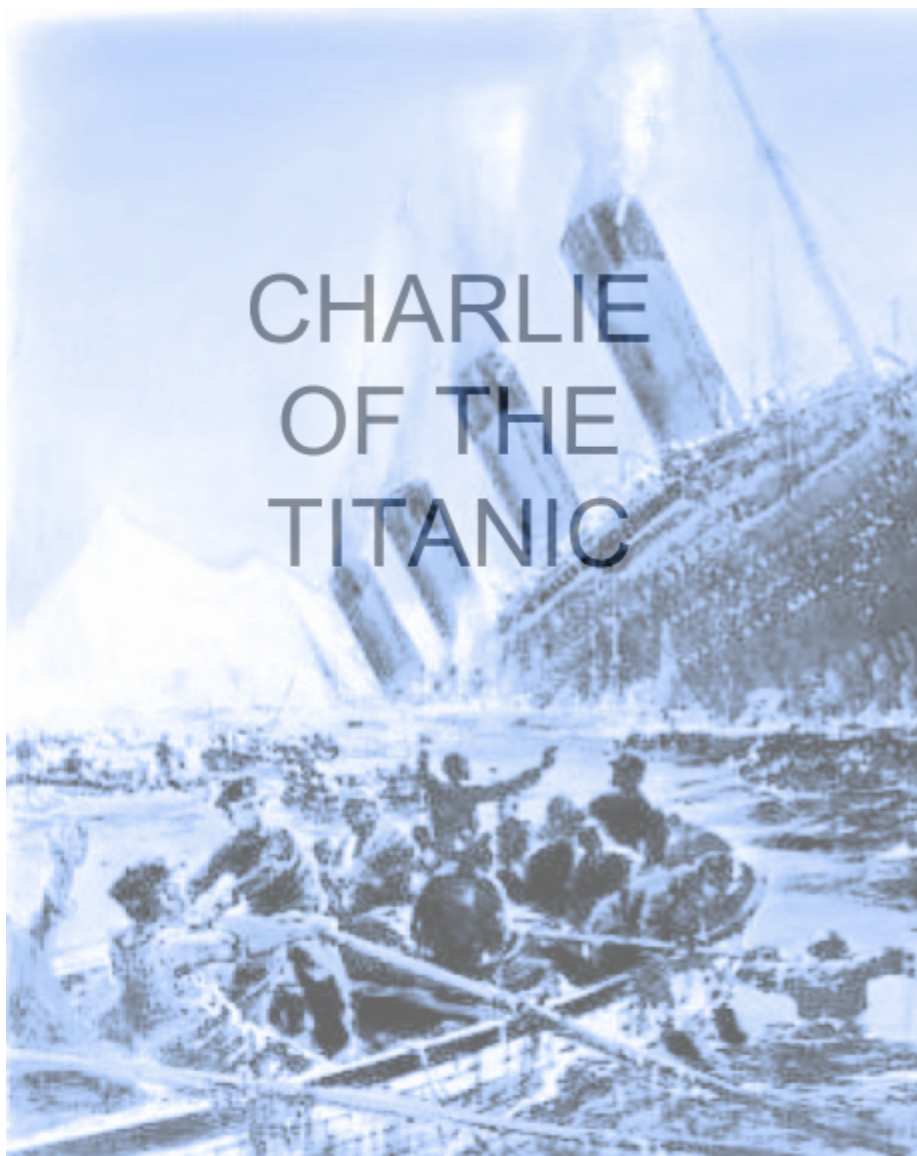


CHARLIE OF THE TITANIC



Charlie of the Titanic

the true story of class and tragedy on that fateful ship

By Andrew Turvey, Charlie's great-nephew

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Prelude

The story of the sinking of the Titanic is still well known, over a hundred years after the event. It's had the Hollywood treatment complete with romantic narrative, Celine Dion soundtrack and Oscar-winning performances. The image is depicted as somehow a symbol of a chivalrous age, where strong men sacrifice themselves for the sake of "women and children first", and where rich and poor were united in a common tragedy.

Yet the story of Charlie Turvey tells quite a different tale. It is probably the saddest story I uncovered in my years of researching my family history. The real story, of tragedy and rigid class structures, seems quite an antidote to the Hollywood makeover.

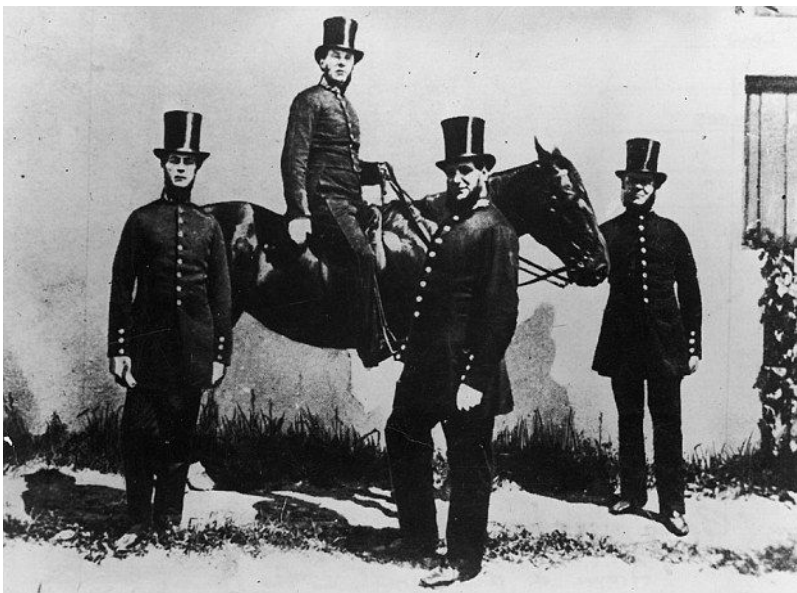
Charlie Turvey was my great uncle Ralph's half brother, and Ralph was the source for most of the information about his life. I got in touch with Ralph when I was ten and had caught an interest in my family history. I had grown up confused about my identity. I lived in Brixton, with its large Afro-Caribbean and Irish communities. My primary school was nearly half black, and our council estate was mostly Irish descent. By comparison, I looked like a typical White British, yet I had been born thousands of miles away in Zimbabwe. Looking for answers, at a young age, I took an interest in my family tree.

Whether I found any answers, I'm not sure, although I certainly discovered many interesting stories. The Titanic waiter is the first of these Turvey Tales I have set down on paper in the hope that others in our family find them as interesting as I did and maybe to inspire others to do the same again one day.

Born with a silver spoon nearby

Charles Thomas Turvey was born in 1896 in Bayswater, then - just as now - an expensive and fashionable suburb just near London's biggest royal park, Hyde Park. Charlie's grandfather had moved from Bristol to Bayswater in the 1870s to work as a coachman to the Duke of Beaufort at his new London residence. They lived in Fulton Mews, above the stables - now long since converted into flats.

Keeping horses had been in the Turvey blood for many generations; Charlie's father had also been born above some stables - the Admiralty Stables at Great Scotland Yard, where his father was keeping the horses of the recently-forced Metropolitan Police. Charlie's great grandfather had been a huntsman for the Duke of Beaufort's foxhunt back in Bristol; his uncle was a hackney carriage driver - horse drawn at first, but he moved to driving one of the first petrol taxis when they came out. Another uncle worked in a livery yard in Kensington; back in Bristol several cousins were stablemen and grooms, others had gone from running stables to innkeepers and pub landlords; and a century earlier, his ancestors had worked in the Bristol coal mines, tending the horses that kept the mines from being flooded.



Bow Street Horse Patrol ca. 1790

Serving the landed aristocracy was also in the family history: his uncle was a footman to a family in Hyde Park Gardens; a twice great uncle had been the bailiff to the Smyth Baronets of Ashton Court, managing their property at Heath House, in the Bristol suburb of Stapleton. And of course, their service to the estates of the Duke of Beaufort, the leading landed gentry of South Gloucestershire, have already been mentioned.

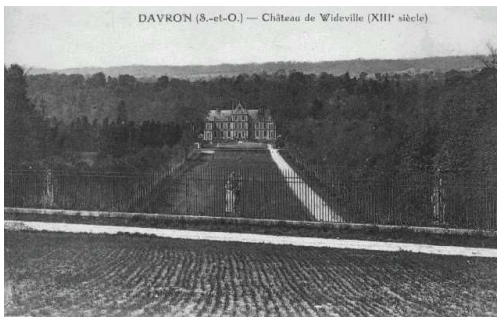


Heath House, in Stapleton, Bristol

From Bayswater to France

Charlie's father married his mother, Hannah Raynham, when he was 24 years' old. He followed in the family tradition, finding work first as a coachman at a country house in Oxfordshire and then in 1893 he started work as the "Stud Groom" for Louis Francois, Comte de Galard-Saldebru, a petty French aristocrat who lived at the 16th century Chateau de Wideville, some 25 miles outside Paris. At the time, the French tradition of having English stable managers was

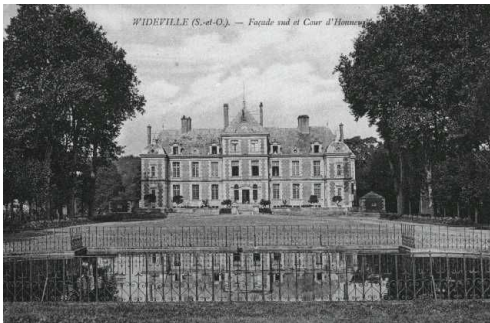
seen as similar to the English tradition of having French chefs. The Comte de Galard had bought the Chateau in 1870 and made many improvements to the Chateau which are still there today.



Château de Wideville, pictured in 1900

Charlie was born back in London where his grandparents lived. However, he grew up in France with his parents on the estate. The chateau staff who lived on the estate included the Turvey family, two other English stablemen plus the chef, M. Lefevre, and his wife. The seven of them all lived in rooms in the stable building.

His father travelled all over France with the Count, Countess and their family, visiting their numerous titled relatives and going on hunting trips, leaving his wife and Charlie at home in the stables.



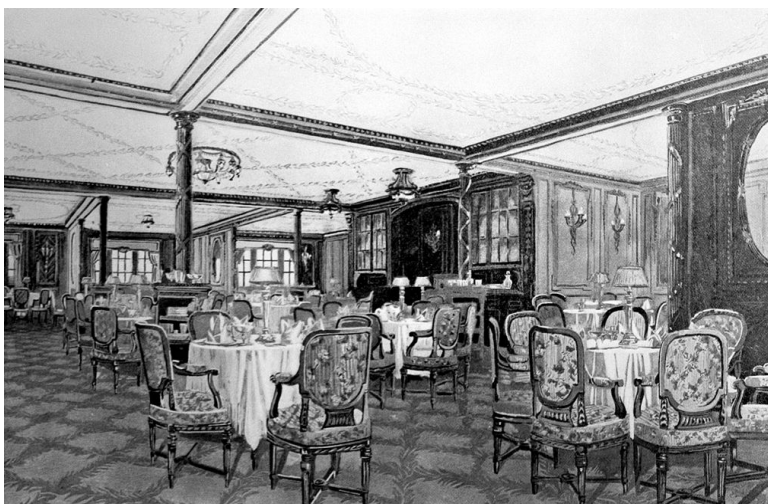
However, this all changed for Charlie just after his sixth birthday when his mother died. The circumstances of her death are unclear. But the requirements of his father's job would have made it impossible to care for him at such a young age

and with no other relatives in France, Charlie was sent to England to school, with the support of his extended family there.

His father remarried three years later and his half-brother, Ralph, was born a year after that. Ralph grew up at the Chateau, but Charlie stayed in England to finish his schooling. He left school aged 15 and started work in London as a hotel page, living with his aunt and uncle.

In March 1912, he came to stay with his family at the Château, where he spent time with his half-brother Ralph and the new addition to the family, Phil, who was just one month old. He told his family of his new job - he was to be a page boy in the Ritz Restaurant of Signor Gatti, the famous Italian chef on board the RMS Titanic, the largest passenger liner in existence.

It was a perfect job for Charlie: naturally tall, he had been brought up to stand to attention; he had managed to pass himself off as a year older than he actually was, in order to get the job. Serving the aristocracy came naturally to the Turveys, so the a la carte restaurant, booked by an elite within the first class passengers, designed to cater to their every whim, was a natural environment for him. His fluent French and English was a real asset taking the orders from the predominantly English speaking passengers and passing them on to predominantly Italian and French kitchen staff. Very excited about his new job, he said goodbye to his family and returned to England, promising his brother he would bring him back a football from New York.



À La Carte restaurant on the Titanic, with French walnut paneling, gilt-bronze fixtures, carpeted floors and chandeliers hanging from the ceiling

The departure

He took the train down to Southampton to meet with the rest of the restaurant staff. They joined the ship on 6 April and Charlie saw for the first time the splendour of the Ritz: The room itself was decorated in the French style of Louis VI, and featured walls with delicate walnut veneers set off by gilded swags and festoons. These gilded swags were repeated in the plaster ceiling and on the borders of the china. Crystal chandeliers hung overhead, fixed to the ceiling so the guests wouldn't see them swaying with the ship's movements.

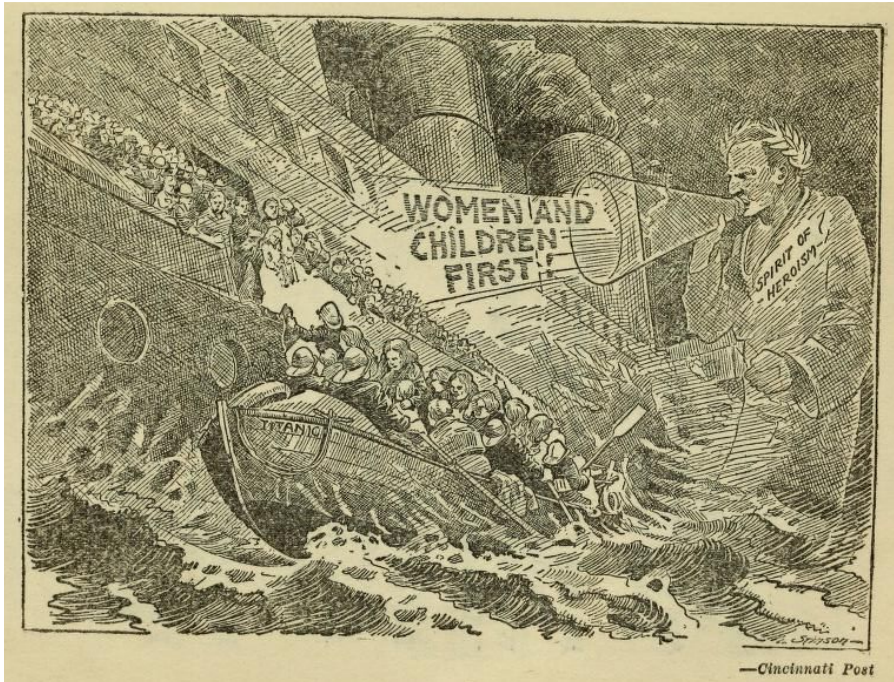
The social hierarchy, that Charlie had grown up with, also came with him aboard the Titanic. The passengers were strictly segregated as First Class, Second Class or Third Class, with only the First Class allowed in the a la carte restaurant. The crew were also ranked: ships' officers and deck crew were the most senior, with subcontractors such as the restaurant staff in the bottom ranks.

The hierarchy also went with the ship's people to their graves: whilst nearly two thirds of first class passengers survived, less than half of second class passengers did and only a quarter of those in third class. Likewise with the crew: two thirds of the deck crew survived, but only one in five of the other staff and less than one in twenty of the restaurant subcontractors.

When the Titanic struck the iceberg, word quickly spread throughout the ship causing quite a panic when it started to lean to one side. But for the restaurant staff that panic was doubled, as the crew members locked them in the second class quarters, banning them from going on deck to prevent them from taking seats on the lifeboats.

It's a cliché of the tragedy that the number of lifeboat spaces was too few to save all those on board. But it was inevitable that those at the bottom of the pile would be those that missed out.

Before the ship sank, the restaurant staff had managed to get onto the decks but by that time, of course, the lifeboats had all left.



The "Spirit of Heroism", celebrated in a newspaper soon after the sinking

Two of the female staff had been allowed out - following the captain's orders of "women and children first". Yet none of the young boys in the staff were considered young enough to count as "children". The cutoff was 14 - and just turned 16, Charlie was just too old to be considered.

We can only imagine the horror of knowing the ship was sinking, seeing the water flow in but being unable to open the doors to get out. The frantic effort to smash the doors open when the water

started to pour in. To finally succeed, only to rush on deck to find the boats already gone without them.

Many jumped into the sea or were washed off at the end, when the Titanic sank. Their last moments spent in the icy waters hoping that some of the half-empty lifeboats would turn around to pluck them out of the water. But for the restaurant staff, none of them did.

The telegram

It was mid April when news reached the Château of the fate of the Titanic. William, Grace, Ralph and Phil in the pram had been for a walk and on their return they found a telegram waiting for them, telling them about the sinking and that Charles was not amongst those rescued.

Charlie's father never got completely over the death of his son. Combined with the loss of his first wife and the difficult childhood he had provided for Charlie, shuttled between France and England, he must have been racked with guilt and sadness about it all. It changed his character completely, to one given to moods and irritation.

William and Grace had a third child, a daughter Margaret, five years after the death of Charlie. Margaret remembers her mother as young, full of energy and warmth. But her father was different: he was distant with her; it was as if a part of him was also lost that icy night in April 1912 off Newfoundland.

List of illustrations

Cover Page: Der Untergang der Titanic, engraving by Willy Stöwer; now in the public domain; on Wikipedia at

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